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Surgo Releases Results of National Survey on COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy: Results Show the Top Vaccine Barriers People Worry About in Each State

Top Anticipated Vaccine Barriers by Non-Vaccinated Adults are Appointment Availability, Not Having the Time to Get Vaccinated, and Concerns over Cost

WASHINGTON, May 18, 2021—Today Surgo Ventures released the results of its largest survey of U.S. adults to date about their barriers to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine—a survey of 17,907 people ([link](#))—which was completed on April 14, 2021. Surgo collaborated with Facebook to recruit survey participants via ads on the Facebook platform.

The survey results provide a blueprint for state and local leaders to achieve [President Biden's stated goal](#) of ensuring 70% of U.S. adults get at least their first shot by the Fourth of July. In analyzing the survey findings, Surgo has identified **the vaccine barriers that are currently driving reluctance among unvaccinated adults in each state** (see page 2).

Surgo also identified **the states where [its five designated COVID-19 vaccine "personas"](#)—The Enthusiasts, The Watchful, The Cost-Anxious, The System Distrusters, and The COVID Skeptics—are most prevalent** (see page 5).

"As we [predicted](#) just a few weeks ago, boosting COVID vaccine uptake in the U.S. is a whole lot harder now that demand is flagging. President Biden has set a good, aggressive goal to help us overcome this challenge, but it won't work without focusing on the exact reasons why people aren't committing to get vaccinated, and offering specific, localized solutions to overcome those barriers," said **Dr. Sema K. Sgaier**, Co-Founder and CEO of Surgo Ventures and Adjunct Assistant Professor at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

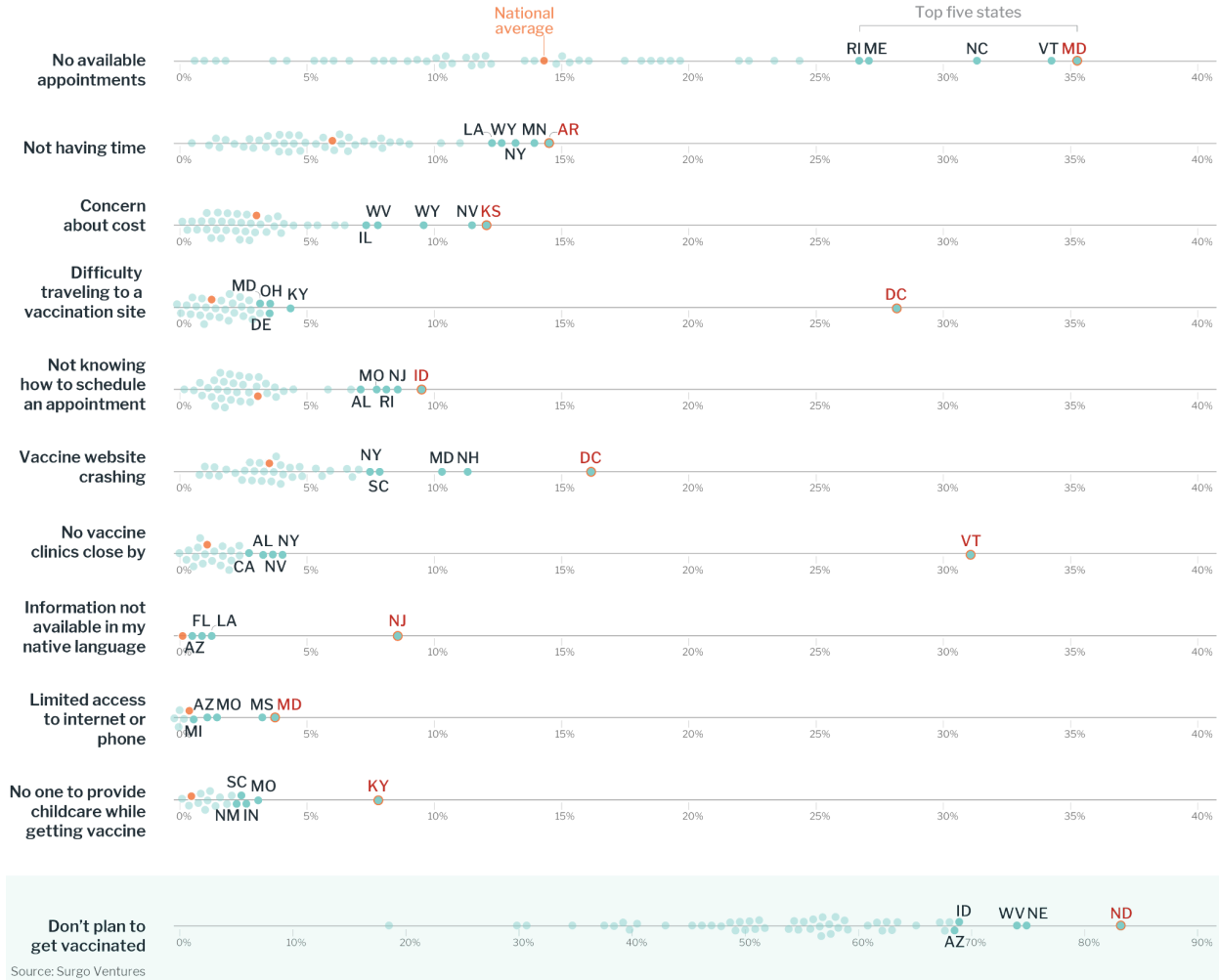
"States are going to have to get really creative in their solutions for bringing the vaccine as close to people as possible. This means experimenting with different models, including neighborhood vans, making vaccines available at workplaces, supermarkets, or other convenient places, and offering smart incentives—both monetary and non-monetary—to get people to commit. There is lots of evidence from global health showing that this works," Sgaier added.

Notably, Surgo found that **people in states where unvaccinated adults were most enthusiastic anticipated barriers to COVID-19 vaccination at much higher rates**, suggesting that people don't start thinking more concretely about barriers until they've confirmed that they even want to get vaccinated.

Because of this finding, Surgo divided its key findings among **barriers anticipated by U.S. adults who have not yet been vaccinated** (see chart on page 2), and barriers actually experienced by U.S. adults **who had already been vaccinated with at least one dose** (see chart on page 3).

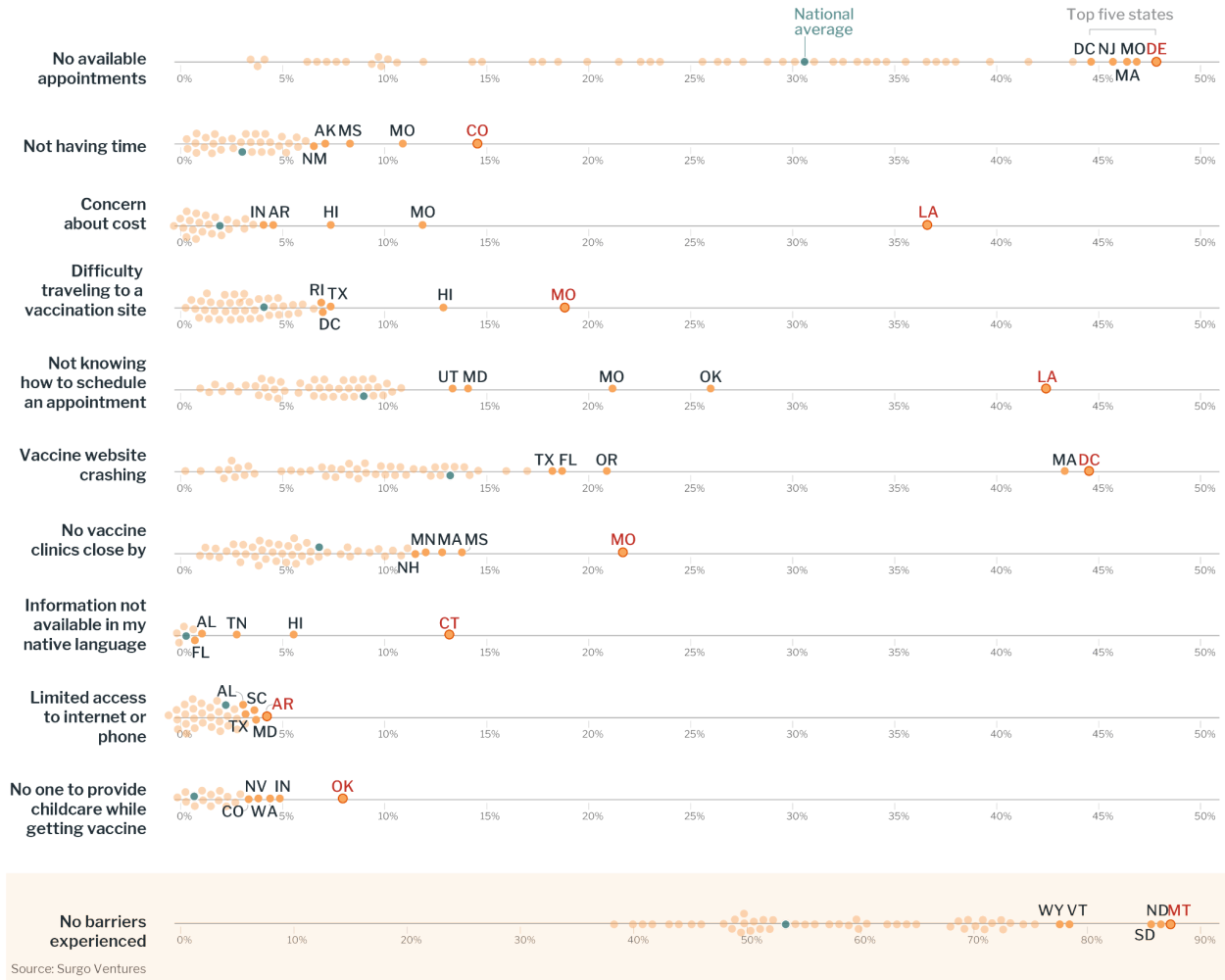
What are the main anticipated vaccine barriers for people in each state?

Barriers identified by U.S. adults who have not yet been vaccinated.



What are the main experienced vaccine barriers for people in each state?

Barriers identified by U.S. adults who had already been vaccinated with at least one dose.








Key Findings

- The top reported barriers by non-vaccinated individuals are appointment availability, having the time to get vaccinated, and concerns over cost.** These barriers, however, vary state by state. In Alabama and Mississippi, which have the lowest vaccination rates, policymakers will want to focus on increasing appointment availability and exploring ways to reduce the time-burden of vaccination. In Wyoming and Idaho, state officials should focus on emphasizing that vaccination is free of cost and educating on how to schedule an appointment. Notably, Surgo found that in **states where unvaccinated individuals were most enthusiastic, people anticipated barriers to vaccination at much higher rates**, suggesting that they don't start thinking more concretely about barriers until they've confirmed that they even want to get vaccinated and that perceived difficulty may be related to intensity of demand.
 - Opportunity Area:** States should focus on the barriers most prominent for their populations to immediately increase vaccine uptake. Addressing these barriers will

help close the gap between vaccine intention and action for individuals already primed for vaccination.

- **Specific vaccine personas are more prevalent in certain states.** Arkansas, North Dakota, and Nevada should focus their efforts on COVID Skeptics while Mississippi and Alaska should prioritize the concerns of the Cost-Anxious. Respectively, Delaware, Hawaii, and Rhode Island should invest in interventions for Watchful individuals, and Washington, D.C., and Maryland should develop strategies to respond to the concerns of System Distrusters.
 - **Opportunity Area:** *States should focus on interventions that build confidence in the vaccine based on the most prevalent personas in their population. These efforts should be informed by local context, looking different even for states with the same most prevalent segment. For example, COVID misinformation circulating in Arkansas is likely different from Nevada. System Distrusters in Idaho differ from those in Georgia.*
- **Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and white respondents fall across all five personas, indicating that we cannot treat racial categories as monoliths.** However, there are some patterns in which personas are most prevalent. Higher proportions of white respondents identify as COVID Skeptics (17.7% in March) compared to Hispanic/Latinx (13.2%) and Black (10.7%) respondents. System Distrusters are more likely to identify as Black (18%) and Hispanic/Latinx (11%) than white (4%). Differences between racial subgroups in percentage of Enthusiasts shrunk over time. In March, over 20% of respondents from across all racial and ethnic groups identified as Enthusiasts.
 - **Opportunity Area:** *Inequities in vaccine uptake have been reported across the country by [the CDC](#). To close the equity gap in vaccination, we need to address the unique concerns that Black and Hispanic/Latinx individuals have, which our national data show are heterogenous. Ensuring racial equity in vaccination will require tackling both issues of access and concerns about vaccination. We can look state by state to see which personas and barriers are most prevalent for minority populations. By broadening the conversation around identity to include multidimensional barriers and beliefs, policymakers can take an equity-oriented approach while explicitly addressing the valid concerns of their constituents.*
- **Vaccine personas, belief in conspiracy theories, and anticipated vaccination timelines vary across the political spectrum.** Republicans remain overrepresented in the COVID Skeptic persona, but that number has fallen over time, from 33% in January to 26% in March. Republicans (61%) and Independents (41%) are much more likely to believe in any conspiracy theory compared to Democrats (25%). Across all political groups, between 20 and 30% of respondents said they want to wait at least three months to get vaccinated or don't know when they will get vaccinated.
 - **Opportunity Area:** *The discourse around political affiliation is not helpful in addressing underlying drivers of vaccine reluctance as it reduces individuals to one facet of their identity. Localized efforts should focus on combating misinformation around COVID-19 that spans party lines, increasing access to vaccination, and emphasizing the benefits of vaccination that most appeal to specific subpopulations,*

such as gathering with family, going to church, socializing with friends, traveling, and attending sporting events.

Vaccine Persona	States with highest proportion of this persona (% of the state adult population)
 <p>Enthusiasts</p>	<p>1. Vermont (18%) 2. North Carolina (14%) 3. Georgia (13%) 4. Tie: Louisiana (12%) and Utah (12%)</p> <p><i>Enthusiasts are people who want to get the vaccine as soon as possible. A key challenge will be ensuring that they can access the vaccine before they lose enthusiasm. Their reported vaccination likelihood (on a scale up to 10) is 9.37.</i></p>
 <p>Watchful</p>	<p>1. Delaware (17%) 2. West Virginia (15%) 3. Oklahoma (14%) 4. Wyoming (13%) 5. Hawaii (12%)</p> <p><i>The Watchful are people who primarily need to see friends and peers having safe, positive vaccination experiences before they will commit. Their reported vaccination likelihood (on a scale up to 10) is 4.95.</i></p>
 <p>Cost-Anxious</p>	<p>1. Mississippi (23%) 2. West Virginia (17%) 3. Alaska (16%) 4. Tie: Wyoming (14%) and Missouri (14%)</p> <p><i>The Cost-Anxious are those for whom time and cost are the key barriers. Every member of this group has delayed seeing care for their health in the past due to cost regardless of insurance status. Their reported vaccination likelihood (on a scale up to 10) is 4.16.</i></p>
 <p>System Distrusters</p>	<p>1. Washington, DC (11%) 2. Georgia (8%) 3. Maryland (7%) 4. Tie: Michigan (6%) and Louisiana (6%)</p> <p><i>System Distrusters are people who primarily believe that people of their own race are not treated fairly by the health system. Members of this group are likely to belong to, but are not exclusively, communities of color. Their reported vaccination likelihood (on a scale up to 10) is 3.81.</i></p>
 <p>COVID Skeptics</p>	<p>1. Arkansas (30%) 2. North Dakota (29%) 3. Wyoming (25%) 4. Louisiana (24%) 5. Idaho (23%)</p> <p><i>COVID Skeptics are people who don't believe in vaccines in general, but the primary barrier is their deeply held beliefs around COVID-19. Every person in this group believes in at least one conspiracy theory. Their reported vaccination likelihood (on a scale up to 10) is 2.34.</i></p>

See Surgo's full report ([link](#)) for a breakdown of the top barriers to vaccination and the prevalence of each vaccine persona for all 50 states plus Washington, DC.

How to Address the Barriers People Are Concerned About

Following is a sampling of Surgo's proposed solutions for reaching the five vaccine personas. For a more detailed list of solutions, download Surgo's full report ([link](#)).

Enthusiasts

- Make it as easy as possible for them to get the vaccine.
- Make it visible that they've been vaccinated, on social media or elsewhere.

Watchful

- Make it visible that others are vaccinated or have positive intent to be vaccinated.
- Capitalize on positive social norms.
- Have health providers assuage concerns around side-effects.
- Allow for uncertainty through a "vaccinate later" option.

Cost-Anxious

- Prioritize communication from credible messengers that vaccination is totally free.
- Bring vaccines to people.
- Offer employees paid time off to get the vaccine.
- Make the process easy and remove "sludge" in the registration process by eliminating information that is not critical.

The System Distrusters

- Listen and learn from community concerns.
- Partner with trusted community organizations, providers, etc. and ensure thoughtful location choices for vaccines.
- Make it visible that the community is getting vaccinated.
- Track and illuminate efforts for equity in vaccine distribution.

The COVID Skeptics

- Enlist nonpolitical figures trusted by this group as vaccine ambassadors.
- Prevent misinformation from taking wider hold in the population.

Download Surgo's full survey report, *Leveraging Precision Health to Increase COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake: A Geographic Overview of Barriers and Beliefs* ([link](#)).

See a visual explainer about the COVID-19 vaccine personas and Surgo's approach to psychobehavioral segmentation [here](#).

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